

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O 091315Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9149
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
USCINCEUR IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4585

EXDIS

JIDDA FOR THE SECRETARY

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, PBOR, LE, US, IS
SUBJECT: LEBANON IN EXTREMIS

1. ALTHOUGH LAST TWO NIGHTS HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET,
FOR BEIRUT, SNIPING AND SHELLING ARE DAILY FARE HERE, AND
OUTLOOK FOR LEBANON IS GRIM. SYRIANS APPEAR DETERMINED NOT
TO GIVE IN AND MARONITES ARE SHOWING EQUALLY STUBBORN DETERMINA-
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TION TO GET SYRIANS OUT. EASTERN HALF OF BEIRUT IS LARGELY
DESERTED, EXCEPT FOR ARMED MILITIAS, AND AIR IS HEAVY
WITH TENSION. DRIVING FROM HERE TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, OR
ANYWHERE ELSE ACROSS THE CONFRONTATION LINE, IS AN ADVENTURE
AND WE ARE INCREASINGLY CONFINED TO OUR RAS BEIRUT GHETTO.
QUESTION IN OUR MINDS IS HOW LONG THIS AREA WILL REMAIN
RELATIVELY SAFE, AT LEAST IN DAYLIGHT. IT IS ALREADY UNSAFE AT

NIGHT BECAUSE OF MOSLEM MILITIAS WHO RULE THE STREETS.

2. BRITISH AMBASSADOR WAKEFIELD SAW PRIME MINISTER HOSS SUNDAY AND TOLD HIM HE WAS CONSIDERING FOLLOWING OUR EXAMPLE AND SENDING DEPENDENTS OUT IF SOMETHING WAS NOT DONE ABOUT THE SECURITY SITUATION IN WEST BEIRUT. PRIME MINISTER, WHO SUFFERS FROM SAME SORT OF ISOLATION AS PRESIDENT, SAID HE WAS VERY SURPRISED. HE PROFESSED NOT TO KNOW THAT SYRIANS HAVE LARGELY ABANDONED THIS AREA OF CITY WHICH IS INCREASINGLY RULED BY GANGS. HE SAID HE WOULD LOOK INTO IT.

3. WAKEFIELD POINTED OUT TO MET THAT IT SYRIANS RESUME FIRING FROM THE MURR TOWER, WHICH IS JUST SOUTH OF THE PHOENICIA HOTEL, AND THE CHRISTIANS RESPOND, HIS RESIDENCE, OUR EMBASSY AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WILL BE IN THE PATH OF THE OVERS. THERE WAS SOME FIRING FROM THAT TOWER SUNDAY NIGHT, BUT APPARENTLY NO ROCKETS WERE USED. WAKEFIELD TOLD COL. KHATIB OF ADF OF HIS CONCERNS ON MONDAY NIGHT, AND KHATIB PROMISED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

4. MEANWHILE, GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO BE SILENT AND SHOWS FEW SIGNS OF LIFE. KINSOLVING AND I HAD LONG TALK WITH BOUTROS AND MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS RIZK AT LUNCH ON SUNDAY AND I ASKED WHETHER THEY THOUGHT IT WAS POSSIBLE BY ANY MEANS THEY COULD ENVISAGE TO CONVINCE THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS TO STOP PROVOKING THE SYRIANS, OR THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SYRIANS FROM RESPONDING AS THEY DO. THEY SAID THEY DID NOT THINK SO, BUT AGREED THAT WE SHOULD KEEP TRYING ANYWAY. MY BRITISH AND FRENCH COLLEAGUES SHARE THEIR OPINION. CHAMOUN, FROM THE BASEMENT OF HIS BUILDING, AND BASHIR GEMAYEL, FROM WHEREVER HE IS, ARE ALLEGEDLY CONVINCED THAT IF THINGS GET BAD ENOUGH, THE ISRAELIS ARE GOING TO INTERVENE AND SAVE THEM. ISRAELI ASSURANCES THAT THEY HAVE TOLD THE CHRISTIANS TO COOL IT MAY VERY WELL BE HONEST AND SINCERE, BUT MOST LEBANESE AND MOST OF MY COLLEAGUES ARE CONVINCED ISRAELIS ARE ACTUALLY ENCOURAGING THE CHRISTIANS TO KEEP UP THE PROVOCATIONS. THE FACT THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE DELIVERING WEAPONS, EVEN "LIGHT" WEAPONS (THE 120 MM MORTAR, INCIDENTALLY, IS NOT LIGHT) AND THE STATEMENTS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, OF MR. BEGIN ARE TOKENS OF ISRAELI SUPPORT WHICH THE CHRISTIANS TAKE VERY SERIOUSLY. SIMILARLY, THE VOTE IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AGAINST AID TO SYRIA HAS BEEN A GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO THEM. THEY CONCLUDE THAT THEY HAVE POWERFUL ALLIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE DECLARATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ABOUT SUPPORT FOR SARKIS AND THE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON ARE EYEWASH. IN THEIR VIEW, THE REAL AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, MEANING THE FRIENDS OF CHARLES MALIK, IS BEHIND THE ISARELIS IN SUPPORTING A FORWARD ATTITUDE

BY THE CHRISTIANS.

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JIDDA FOR THE SECRETARY

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

5. FOR THEIR PART, THE SYRIANS SEEM UNABLE TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY
WITH THE SITUATION. THEIR INDISCRIMINATE BOMBARDMENT OF
CHRISTIAN AREAS IS, ACCORDING TO BOUTROS, THE ONLY WAY
THE SYRIANS KNOW HOW TO FIGHT. HE SAYS THEY CAN FIRE
FROM FIXED POSITIONS, BUT DO NOT KNOW HOW TO MANEUVER. HE
THINKS THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF GETTING THE SYRIANS TO
CHANGE THEIR TACTICS. WAKEFIELD GATHERED FROM HOSS THAT
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NEITHER HE NOR SARKIS NOR BOUTROS HAVE EVEN MADE THE EFFORT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ADF COMMANDER, SAMI KHATIB, REPORTS THAT SARKIS WILL NOT GIVE THE SYRIANS THE ORDERS THEY NEED TO COPE EFFECTIVELY WITH THE KATAEB. PRESUMABLY, HE MEANS SARKIS WILL NOT AUTHORIZE THEM TO ACTUALLY CRUSH THE KATAEB. (WE ARE NOT SURE THEY COULD IF THEY TRIED.)

6. SO THE SYRIANS AND CHRISTIAN MILITIAS ARE LOCKED IN VIOLENT, BUT LIMITED, COMBAT, AND NEITHER IS PREPARED TO GIVE GROUND. BOTH ARE ALLEGEDLY PREPARED TO WITNESS THE DESTRUCTION OF BEIRUT IF NECESSARY. THE ISRAELIS, BOTH IN THE NORTH AND IN THE SOUTH, WHATEVER THEIR PROTESTATIONS TO THE CONTRARY, ARE COMPLICATING THE SITUATION THROUGH THEIR SUPPORT OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WAVES ITS ANTENNAE SILENTLY IN DISTRESS, BUT HAVING HAD LITTLE LUCK AT KAWKABA IS WARY OF NEW INITIATIVES. MEANWHILE, THE FUNCTIONAL PARTITION WHICH HAS EXISTED FOR MONTHS IS BECOMING INSTITUTIONALIZED. EACH DAY THERE ARE NEW OBSTACLES TO MOVING FROM ONE SECTOR TO ANOTHER, AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO TAKE THE CHANCE OF A SNIPER'S BULLET DIMINISHES. THE PORT IS CLOSED UNDER THREAT OF KATAEB SHELLING, BANKS ARE MOVING THEIR OFFICES, TAXIS ARE SCARCE, AND THE CITY IS DYING. THE ONLY HAPPY PEOPLE SEEM TO BE THE INEVITABLE PROFITEERS, LIKE THE INNKEEPERS OF KESROUAN, WHO ARE CHARGING THEIR FLEEING MARONITE BRETHREN THROUGH THE NOSE FOR ACCOMMODATIONS. IT IS AN ILL WIND WHICH SOME LEBANESE CANNOT EXPLOIT.

7. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE IS NOT A GREAT DEAL THE UNITED STATES CAN DO ABOUT IT ALL. OUR AID, OUR STATEMENTS AND OUR HIGH-LEVEL DEMARCHES OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF HAVE NOT RESOLVED THE BASIC PROBLEMS OR BROUGHT US ANY CLOSER TO THE INTERNAL HARMONY WHICH IS NEEDED IF THIS COUNTRY IS TO

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SURVIVE, BECAUSE THEY LACKED THE TEETH WHICH ONLY MILITARY INTERVENTION CAN GIVE. THE FUTURE OF LEBANON TODAY IS IN THE HANDS OF THE MILITARY: THE ARMED MILITIAS, MARONITE AND PALESTINIAN, THE SYRIANS AND THE ISRAELIS. WE HAVE NO PRACTICAL INFLUENCE WITH THE FIRST GROUP AND EVIDENTLY VERY LITTLE WITH THE SECOND AND THIRD. BEGIN MAY BE VICTIM OF HIS OWN MISCONCEPTIONS AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES, WE ARE IN NO POSITION TO JUDGE. HAFEZ AL-ASSAD MAY NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND OR PERHAPS HE DOESN'T CARE. (GIVEN THE UNCOMPLIMENTARY STATEMENTS HIS FOREIGN MINISTER MADE ABOUT SARKIS TO THE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR ON JULY 28, PERHAPS IT IS THE LATTER.) HE SEEMS DETERMINED TO IMPOSE SYRIAN AUTHORITY OVER THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS,

COME WHAT MAY. IF HE PERSISTS, WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A
MARKED ESCALATION OF THE FIGHTING.
PARKER

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